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C O N F I D E N T I A L NAIROBI 001128

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SUBJECT: KENYA ELECTIONS: NARC-K IN THE DARK, ODM ROADSHOW  
ABANDONED

Classified By: Political Counselor Larry Andre for reasons 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: A day before it was scheduled to kickoff, NARC-Kenya postponed indefinitely its party elections and President Kibaki's expected announcement of his candidacy. The sudden change of plans was accompanied by further protest from one-time government supporter, Health Minister Charity Ngilu over what she calls Kibaki's betrayal of the original NARC coalition. The opposition ODM is no closer to finding consensus among its presidential hopefuls as the party abandoned plans for a group trip to London for an offsite huddle and to tap into the deep pockets of the Kenyan diaspora. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) As Kenya inches towards its next general election, expected in December, its main parties remain unsettled. A day before its scheduled March 3 kickoff, the pro-government NARC-Kenya party postponed its party elections. March 3 was also supposed to be the date President Kibaki formally (and finally) declared his intention to run for re-election as a NARC-K candidate. The party claimed it could not commence national elections for party officials because some areas were unprepared. Media reports indicated, however, that some NARC-K MPs favored postponement because the party had not yet sufficiently marketed itself around the country.

¶3. (SBU) Among holdouts from the 2002's successful (in the general election, but later to crumble) NARC coalition Health Minister Charity Ngilu has been the most vocal. While she has been calling on Kibaki not to abandon NARC for NARC-Kenya since its registration in mid-2005, her campaign took on renewed vitriol when she accused the President of betraying his coalition. She also lashed out at cabinet colleagues, accusing them of corruption and neglecting the country's needs. At the same time Ngilu announced that she would run for President against Kibaki.

¶4. (SBU) The government and opposition hardly have the energy to spar with each other as they struggle to get their own houses in order. In a move some observers called a retreat to settle their differences, opposition ODM-K leaders planned to be in London March 9 for a long weekend of introspection. The London field trip was also to be a fund raising exercise with a number of events planned for UK-based ODM supporters. On March 8, however, presidential candidates Kalonzo Musyoka, Uhuru Kenyatta, and William Ruto all backed out of the trip. Odinga's office attributed the change in plans to UK visa troubles for Ruto and one other ODM member

(Musalia Mudavadi who had not planned to attend, anyway). Travel glitches aside, the ODM's retreat was on shaky ground. An opposition member of Parliament on March 3 told PolSpecialist that the trip was an Odinga initiative to which other members were reluctant to sign on.

15. (C) The Acting U.K. High Commissioner told the DCM on March 7 that among the six ODM presidential candidates who planned to attend, William Ruto was not permitted to travel. In connection with unresolved corruption allegations, earlier in the week the UK informed Ruto that his visa was going to be denied, offering him the opportunity to withdraw his application. Ruto declined, and the High Commissioner remarked they expect he will take his case public, claiming that the British government is trying to hand pick the ODM candidate by deliberately excluding him. While the UK was not going to issue Ruto a visa anyway, they were also urged by exiled Kenyan anti-corruption warrior John Githongo to bar Ruto. Githongo, the High Commissioner noted, was organizing part of ODM's program in London.

16. (C) COMMENT: While Ngilu would like to give the impression that she is taking the high road - decrying corruption, calling for coalition preservation - this is a game she has played before. During Kibaki's post-referendum defeat cabinet reshuffle in December 2005, Ngilu turned down an initial cabinet assignment, claiming to disagree with Kibaki's non-consultative process, but bargaining for more appointments for her party. As NARC chairwoman she occupied a powerful party seat. In NARC-Kenya she has little possibility of retaining her chairmanship with much stronger political figures vying for that position (Saitoti and Kituyi). END COMMENT.  
RANNEBERGER